

By MICHAEL KNOX — Wycombe Wanderers 0, Minehead 0

WYCOMBE WANDERERS will have much the same look as last season if Saturday's goal-less friendly with Southern Leaguers Minehead at Loakes Park is anything to go by. With one or two exceptions they will field virtually the same team as took them to third place in the Isthmian League.

Only three new faces turned out for the Blues, who were undoubtedly keen to gain revenge for their FA Cup defeat at Minehead last year. However, although dominating much of the game, they were unable to score goals — that's a familiar story!

Of the three, Atkins again looked the most impressive and should make his Premier Division debut at Dagenham on Saturday. His front running colleague Steve Long, the former Loughborough Colleges and Burton Albion player, produced some penetrating runs deep into Minehead territory and could well gain a place.

The other newcomer Dave Allanson from Witney, never really found his feet. He won the occasional tackle but his distribution let him down and he was replaced in the second half.

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One regular favourite making his seasonal debut was Mick Holifield who looked thoroughly refreshed after his holiday and produced a sparkling performance in the first half. However, his lack of fitness told and he faded away towards the end.

To enjoy a successful season, Wycombe need Holifield at his best for most of the time. It always appears that when

Holifield is in top form, Wycombe play well. It was true again of Saturday's game.

Most of the chances Wycombe created came early on. Allanson fired over after good work by Dylan Evans on the left but the best move of the game came after 10 minutes and should have brought a goal.

Long broke through the middle and passed out to Holifield on the left. His first time cross came curling into the goal-mouth and met the head of Stewart Atkins who missed a great chance by putting the ball over the top. Nobody was more annoyed than Atkins himself.

Minehead, fielding five of the side that beat Wycombe last year, were kept back on the defensive and relied on quick breaks to set up dangerous positions. A neat back flick by Mike Simmons put Bobby Brown in the clear but he shot over from an acute angle.

Blues forced a succession of corners midway through the first half and following one of them Keith Mead tested goalkeeper John Macey with a shot from the edge of the area. Macey, it will be remembered, was the Newport goalkeeper who let in three goals in that memorable Wanderers' victory nearly five years ago. He had a happier game this time.

Atkins came close with a flick while under pressure and proved such a handful for the Minehead defence that he was brought down just outside the penalty area. But Kennedy's free-kick went straight at the well-placed Macey.

The match became something of a stalemate in the second half with two well-ordered defences in control. The Wycombe back four looked as sound as ever although Alan Phillips had one of his more casual games. Goal-keeper John Maskell twice fumbled a catch but otherwise was not severely tested.

It was in mid-field that Blues struggled. They still lack a commanding figure there — a position that has not been adequately replaced since the departure of Terry Reardon.

Nevertheless it was a satisfactory if not stunning performance against good opposition, although there is still a nagging doubt about their ability to score goals against a well-organised defence.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips, D. Allanson (sub J. Priestley 70 mins), S. Atkins, M. Holifield, D. Evans (sub D. Harris 70 mins), H. Kennedy, S. Long.

MINEHEAD: J. Macey; A. Clauseq, D. Burden, A. Impey, K. Mallender, M. Powell (sub G. Rogers), R. Brown, D. Wiltshire, S. Whitmore, M. Simmons, B. Durbin.

Referee: D. Mitcham (Holmer Green).



Wycombe's new forward, Steve Long, goes flying through the air but fails to make contact with this headed attempt against Minehead.